

## A VERY PROPER WOMAN

By C. B. Lewis

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As a child little Hannah Wray was very proper. As a young girl she was more proper still. As a young lady, even her very proper father, Deacon Wray, and her very proper mother, his wife, never had to criticize or caution. As Hannah kept adding years to her age and was finally spoken of as an old maid her proper father and mother died, and she went to live with her brother Dan.

Dan was hard headed and hard working and not at all a proper person from some points of view, but that did not affect Hannah any. She had been left \$3,000 in cash, had never had a beau nor read a love story, and she felt that all she had to do in this world was to keep right on being proper.

One day another proper young woman came to call on Hannah. She wasn't quite as proper as Miss Wray, for she had once permitted a young man to walk home from church with her, but she was trying her best to be forgiven by society for that sin.

When she departed she left a circular on the floor, and Hannah picked it up and gave it a careless look. A moment later she was turning pale and gasping for breath. Two minutes later she was upstairs in her room and blushing as she read. It was a circular from a matrimonial bureau.

Notwithstanding her properness, Hannah had heard of such things, but only to be horrified. She was horrified now. She was also interested. She was horrified that her caller should be in receipt of such literature and interested to know if men and women did really get married through such agencies.

For five minutes she refused to read further than the heading. Then she looked all around her room, gave a shudder and proceeded to devour every word. She even read the circular twice over. It was a call to all those in love to send on 50 cents and receive the names of three persons with whom they might correspond. On the books of the agency, so it was stated, were the names of heiresses and wealthy widows plining for husbands, as well as widowers with millions and young men needing wives to help them take care of inheritances. The reader was assured that there were governors, senators and railroad presidents making use of the agency.

Hannah Wray found her heart beating faster as she read, and when she glanced at the glass she found that she was blushing. Her first thought was to rush after her friend and restore the circular and cut her acquaintance forevermore. Her second was to keep the circular and read it over again. Of course she acted on second thought. She did more than that. She allowed her mind to dwell on it and romance to creep over her unromantic soul, and after two or three days she could read it without blushing.

That should be the end, however. Never, never would she permit herself to send away 50 cents and receive the names. She stuck to this resolution for three days, and then she sent off the money. It was the first letter she had ever written to any one except a relative. It was the first time in two years she had visited the village post-office. The day the letter was mailed Dan Wray's wife said to him as he was milking the cow in the barn:

"Say, Dan, something is wrong with Hannah."

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"She's got something on her mind. Two or three times today I've caught her looking in the glass and acting girly. I'm not quite sure of it, but I have a feeling that when she went downtown it was to post a letter. What do you think it is?"

"I know she had mumps, measles and the chicken pox the same time I did," replied Dan after thinking things over, "and she can't be coming down with any of those."

"Of course not. Didn't I say I caught her acting girly?"

"And what's that?"

"Why, twisting herself and simpering and trying to look like a girl."

"Well, what's that the sign of?"

"Dan Wray, you don't know beans when the bag's untied. It means that Hannah is in love. Yes, sir; old as she is, she's either in love or wants to be, and it's our duty to keep an eye on her."

"Well, let her love," answered Dan as he turned to his milking, and that settled matters, as far as he was concerned, for a little while.

In due time Hannah received a reply to her letter. She had been so simple, moderately wealthy and good tempered, and the agency had sent her the names of three rich men who wanted just such a wife as she would make. If the old maid hadn't been so proper she would have opened correspondence with all three of them. As it was, she decided that one was enough. She didn't even decide that until she had struggled with her feelings for three long days.

Curiosity and romance finally got the better of prudence and propriety, and her letter was duly mailed. During the next five or six days she gave herself away to her sister-in-law in fifty different ways, and even the hard headed brother was compelled to notice that a change had taken place.

"What do you think it is, Dan?" asked the wife as he sat on the milk stool again.

"Durned if I know, Lucy. Has Dea-

con White or any other widower been spooking around here?"

"No, not a soul."

"She keeps primping and looking in the glass and blushing, does she?"

"Twenty times a day. I heard her humming a love song upstairs today, and she's taken to going to the post-office every night and morning. Dan, I tell you we've got to keep our eyes open. Suppose some rich man should come along and coax her to elope with him."

"I guess you and Han are both safe from that," he laughed in reply, and again the subject was dismissed.

Next day the old maid had her letter. It was postmarked Boston, and never in her life did the way from the post-office home seem so long.

It was from Quincy Livingstone Lapin, who had got her address from the agency. Quincy was forty years old, a retired capitalist and a widower, and he wrote a letter full of sentiment and a desire to please. If he didn't know how to touch an old maid's heart, no matter what a proper person she was. By the time she had read it three times over Hannah Wray had gone back on her thirty-five years' record. She mentally pronounced him a darling of a man, and she got ready to answer the epistle. After she had written and mailed it Dan winked his wife out into the wood shed and whispered:

"Got any ginger in the house?"

"No. Why?"

"I'll go down to the store and get some. I've been watching Han, and if she ain't in for a time with the bilious colic then I can't read signs."

"Nonsense. I tell you she's in love."

"In love with what—the cow?"

"She's in love with a man, you idiot, you. Do you suppose she'd be humming love songs and standing before the looking glass for a cow?"

"But where's the man?"

"That's what I can't tell you—not now. But I'm going to find out if I lose my head."

She was several weeks in making her words good, but there came a day when she laid hands on all Hannah's correspondence. She had received six letters from Quincy Livingstone Lapin, and five of them treated of love and romance and his desire to see her. The sixth announced that he would visit the village, which was familiar to him, and walk up and down a certain shady lane until she joined him.

"Well?" asked the wife when she had told the contents of the letter.

"I'll be in that shady lane myself," replied Dan.

And he was. It was in the afternoon, and the village seemed to be asleep. Quincy arrived. So did Hannah. So did Dan. Dan waited until Quincy declared that he could no longer live without Hannah and that she must draw her money out of the bank and flee with him, and then he made his appearance and administered kicks and punches and cuffs until Quincy was beyond his reach. When he got through Hannah had vanished. She kept to her room for the next three days, and she might have made it three weeks had not Dan called up to her from the stair door.

"Say, Han, come down to breakfast."

"I'm—I'm ashamed," she replied.

"Ashamed, nothing. Why, you are the properest person for fifty miles around here. That feller is a patent chum man, and I've been owing him a licking for ten years past. If it hadn't been for you I might never have caught him. Come down, proper Hannah—come properly down!"

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